

SIREN Farm Tour options:

Option 1: Ed and Gerard Rademacher, Prairie Winds Farm Bellingham, MN

Ed and Gerard farm together on over 500 acres of land. They are a two generation farm family raising grass-fed beef and lamb. Gerard retired from milking cows several years ago but continues to milk for his own use and for his family. Gerard and Mary, Ed's parents, live on the original farm place and Ed and Kathy and their three children live on a nearby farm.

How does Prairie Winds Farm enhance environmental quality and contributes to the production of food for human consumption?

Through multi-species grazing Ed has developed a sustainable system for raising livestock. Utilizing two livestock species allows Ed a tool for controlling emerging weeds in his pasture. The sheep follow the beef cows and are grazing on what the cows do not eat. These are often the less desirable plants in the pasture. The control of non-desirable plants through grazing promotes the re-emergence of grasses that have their growing points lower in the plant and will re-grow through-out the season. Both animals contribute minerals back to the soil during the grazing season through their droppings. This completes and important part of the nutrient cycle of the soil increasing the soil fertility for future growing seasons.

Ed markets his grass-fed beef through specialty markets in the region. These markets have provided a premium for his grass-fed beef. Again the multi-species system creates more economic stability since the sales of beef also follow an up and down cycle. Having two products to market provides a buffer when the price for one product fluctuates. Ed and Gerard also compost manure from their farm and sell it in the Twin Cities. This is another way they have diversified the market stream for products on their farm. The fertilizer is organic and has a high value among gardeners in the Twin Cities.

How have these farm families contributed to the quality of life of the community in rural Minnesota?

Ed has been an active mentor for other beef grazers getting started. Through LSP's Livestock Loan program Ed mentored Lyle Kruse and visited his farm annually for five years to help assess the growth of the pasture and the health of the his beef cow herd. Lyle and his family are still raising beef cows and grazing them on a nearby pasture. Lyle's two daughters, Jessica and _____, are both raising livestock and are planning to continue farming with their family in Canby. Ed serves on LSP's Livestock Loan Committee that reviews and makes decisions about applications. LSP's Livestock Loan Program has 22 beginning farmers with no-interest livestock loans over the last 10 year.

Ed also serves on the Soil Water Conservation District Board for Lac Qui Parle County. With his livestock background he brings an important perspective in his service on this board. Ed provides leadership and support to other farmers in the community through his service in local and regional organizations. He is a member of the Land Stewardship Project and the Sustainable Farming Association.

Option 2 – Moonstone Farm, Montevideo MN

Audrey Arner and Richard Handeen manage a 240 acre farm that has maximized profit through increasing diversity and perennialization of their landscape. The 240 acres at Moonstone supports continuous living cover in the form of grazing and hay acres, 40 planted acres of 42 woody species, woods and water. From this perennial system the farmers derive income from sales at their on-farm shop, a farm stay and sales of grass-fed beef to Twin Cities restaurants and local grocery stores.

How does Moonstone Farm enhance environmental quality and contributes to the production of food for human consumption?

With a perennial system, all energy generated by the sun is captured by living plants. No ground is left bare during the growing season. This maximizes the efficiency of a growing system and provides benefits through greatly minimizing soil erosion and increasing soil health over time through the addition of organic matter by decaying plants in and on the soil. Water that enters the farm from nearby farm fields is held on the land through a retention dam. The sediment carried in the water settles out in the dam slowing the water leaving the farm and making it cleaner. A diversity of plant species contributes to a diversity of animal species increasing the opportunity for biological control of emerging crop pests. Rotational grazing, moving the cows before they graze below the growth node of the grass shoot, keeps pasture grasses flourishing throughout the growing season and leads to healthy cows and a more productive system. The system as a whole is human friendly making it an attractive and relaxing place to live and visit. This atmosphere is one of the 'products' of the farm that brings families and individuals to Moonstone for a farm stay. For people living in the area Moonstone farm is almost the only place you can buy locally produced pork, chickens, cheeses, honey, preserves, flours and pottery. It is one of the stops on the Upper Minnesota River Arts Meander.

How have these farm families contributed to the quality of life of the community in rural Minnesota?

Audrey and Richard have contributed greatly to the community in Western Minnesota. They have created numerous opportunities for people to tour their farm and to teach about their farming system including hosting on-farm trials. They have been active members of LSP, SFA and several other community organizations. One of the most important contributions that Audrey and Richard have made to the rural community is by selling products from other farmers in their farm shop. This is the only outlet for some of the regions farmers to sell their products and inversely the only place for people to buy some of these locally raised farm products. Another important contribution that Audrey and Richard have made to the region is by hosting interns on their farm. There is a growing number of young people interested farming and there are too few opportunities for them to learn how to farm especially how to work with large animals and grazing systems. Moonstone farm provides one of a few opportunities for young people to intern on livestock farm. Each year they host 3 to 4 interns. This brings young people interested in farming out to our region and introduces them to the community and to the network of farmers out here. This has been the gateway already for several families who have decided to stay in the region and pursue farming.

Option 3 – John and Sue Roisen and Robin Moore, Lac Qui Parle Grapes

John and Robin form a management team for 8 ½ acres of grapes along the bluffs of the Lac Qui Parle River. John and Sue own the farm which has been in Sue's family for many generations. Robin moved to western Minnesota to farm over 10 years ago and started working for John soon after they started their grape production in 2003. Now John and Robin co-manage the grape production and are the primary supplier of grapes for Morgan Creek Winery out of New Ulm, MN.

How does Lac Qui Parle Grapes enhance environmental quality and contributes to the production of food for human consumption?

The 8 ½ acres of grapes are a perennial system with grass growing between the rows of trellised grapes. Although not organic due to the use of fungicides the vines are managed as a low input system. The one pesticide that is applied is a OMRI approved pesticide. The acres now in grapes are sloped and were once in crops. The conversion to a perennial system has reduced the erosion in these fields and lead to increased soil fertility over time. John and Robin plan to continue to expand the vineyard and are working on increasing their production of juice varieties like King of the North.

How have these farm families contributed to the quality of life of the community in rural Minnesota?

The vines planted in the vineyard are varieties developed in cooperation with the U of MN Department of Horticulture. As one of the pioneers in growing and managing a production scale vineyard in Minnesota, John and Robin have continued to share their knowledge through a network of grape growers from Western Minnesota. They also participate in the annual conference of Minnesota Grape Growers to share their experiences and learn from others. They have invited many aspiring grape growers out to the vineyard to work alongside them and to learn from them. As interest in growing grapes in Minnesota grows they are an important resource for people getting started. This year they sold their first grape juice made from the variety King of the North. They canned the grape juice in a community kitchen in Milan MN. They sold out of their canned grape juice and are looking to market more next year. This is an important contribution to the local food economy in western Minnesota.

Through the addition of 8 ½ acres of grape production, one farm job was created. Although John has mechanized the harvest this vineyard there is enough work that the vineyard has created a farm position for Robin Moore to pursue her dream of farming. This kind of economic opportunity generated through farming for the next generation of farmers in key to revitalizing our rural community.